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PP RUEHBI RUEHCHI RUEHCI RUEHCN
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FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1286

INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1155

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0456

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0458

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0287

RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0189

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0287

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0220

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0081

RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0003

RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0038

RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 0127

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0009

RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RHMFIUU/JIATF WEST

RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC

RHMFIUU/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION WASHINGTON DC

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC

RUEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 0001

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1581

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CALCUTTA 000536

SIPDIS

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PACOM FOR POL/AD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR KCRM SOCI ASEC IN CH CO

SUBJECT: INDIAN AUTHORITIES SEIZE USD 70 MILLION AMPHETAMINE PRECURSOR CHEMICALS IN CALCUTTA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On November 14 officials of the Indian Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) seized an estimated USD 70 million in methamphetamine precursor chemicals in a cargo shipping container at a warehouse in Calcutta. NCB officials arrested Indian national of Chinese origin Vincent Chang alias Chang Xug Song (age 23) and Michel Suanpu (age 36) a Manipur-based businessman from Mizoram, Northeast Indian states bordering Burma. The container originated in Columbia, transited Hong Kong and Huang Pu ports, China, and was to be sent to Gurgaon, a rapidly developing IT center near New Delhi. The shipping container appears to have been a self-contained, mobile factory with the necessary equipment to convert the chemicals to methamphetamine. Locating the shipping container in Gurgaon would have provided a large market of young, IT professionals with greater independence and disposable income and therefore likely to experiment with methamphetamine. This recent arrest and similar arrest in 2003 in Calcutta reflect the effort by drug dealers to expand markets from the traditional but remote Northeast Indian states bordering Burma, where drug usage is endemic, to urban population in centers in India proper. This new tactic use of a shipping container as a "mobile factory" will make detection of such efforts more difficult. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On November 14, 50 NCB officers seized a shipping container in the Balmer Lawrie warehouse at 21 Netaji Subhas Road, Taratala, Calcutta, with methamphetamine precursor chemicals approximately USD 70 million in value. According to NCB contacts, the container was registered to a Chinese company Yong Yong and declared to contain machine tools. The container was loaded in Columbia, transited Hong Kong and Huangpu Port, Guangdong province, China, prior to arriving in Calcutta in October. The container was due to be shipped to Gurgaon, a rapidly developing IT center near New Delhi. Gurgaon has a large and growing middle class community of IT and service

professionals, representing an ideal market for methamphetamine.

This container was actually a second such shipment. A similar container had earlier transited Calcutta in July and was seized by the NCB in Gurgaon in October and apparently led to the latest seizure in Calcutta.

¶3. (U) Authorities have released the name of two arrested suspects, an Indian-national of Chinese origin Vincent Chang alias Chang Xug Song (age 23) and Michel Suanpu (age 36) from Mizoram but based in Manipur, Northeast Indian states bordering Burma. Media reports indicate a total of six people were arrested in connection with the shipment.

¶4. (SBU) Earlier in July, local British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) correspondent Subir Bhaumik noted to ConGen that Northeast India-based drug dealers were seeking to shift production of methamphetamine to markets in India's major urban centers because obtaining precursor chemicals in the Northeast was complicated as was shipping the finished product to the profitable markets in India proper. Bhaumik cited the May 2003 arrest of Burmese Baikha Kema, who was arrested in Calcutta attempting to establish a methamphetamine lab in this city as an example. Kema was never prosecuted, having escaped from jail while awaiting trial. This latest arrest appears to reinforce Bhaumik's observation as authorities told press that the seized container was to have been sent to Mizoram but the dealers decided to shift instead to Gurgaon.

¶5. (SBU) Comment. The arrest of Manipur-based and ethnic Mizo Michel Suanpu in this recent effort to establish a methamphetamine lab in Gurgaon, presents the disturbing prospect of the endemic drug problem of Northeast India bleeding into India's growing IT and service centers. India's burgeoning

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young, middle class IT professionals, business processing and call center workers with ready disposable income represents an attractive potential new market for methamphetamine. These service workers often work long hours, usually doing late night shifts to service customers in the U.S. and Europe. Typically on their own for the first time, these young professionals have ready disposable income and a desire to experiment with their new social independence. Methamphetamine, therefore, is a perfect drug for the sleepless IT workers looking to enjoy their new found money and lifestyle.

JARDINE